



Foreign Agricultural Service

GAIN Report

Global Agriculture Information Network

Voluntary Report - public distribution

Date: 7/31/2001

GAIN Report #NZ1034

New Zealand

Biotechnology

Report on Genetic Modification Released

2001

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Report Highlights: The New Zealand Royal Commission has struck a middle course regarding genetic modification in its 1500 page report released recently (7/30/01). The major conclusion regarding genetic modification is that New Zealand should keep its options open. Potential advantages exist, but N.Z. should proceed carefully with genetic modification in agriculture, minimizing and managing risks. At the same time, continuation of the development of conventional farming, organics and integrated pest management should be facilitated. The New Zealand Government will respond to the report over the next three months. Key documents can be found on www.gmcommission.govt.nz

Includes PSD changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Unscheduled Report
Wellington [NZ1], NZ

The New Zealand Royal Commission struck a middle course regarding genetic modification in its 1500 page report released recently (7/30/01). The N.Z. \$6 million (US \$2.5 million) report led by four commissioners took over 14 months to complete with 11,000 submissions and 330 expert witnesses used. The 49 recommendations made are based on the premise that New Zealand can't afford to ignore the opportunities provided by genetic modification. Key quotes from the Executive Summary Follow:

"Our major conclusion [regarding genetic modification] is that New Zealand should keep its options open. It would be unwise to turn our back on the potential advantages on offer, but we should proceed carefully, minimizing and managing risks. At the same time, continuation of the development of conventional farming, organics and integrated pest management should be facilitated."

"Our recommendations aim to encourage the coexistence of all forms of agriculture. The different production systems should not be seen as being in opposition to each other, but rather as contributing in their own ways to the overall benefit of New Zealand."

"We are satisfied that [New Zealand's] basic regulatory framework is appropriate and that the key institutions, the Environmental Risk Management Agency and the Australia New Zealand Food Authority, carry out their functions conscientiously and soundly."

"Technology is integral to the advancement of the world. Fire, the wheel, steam power, electricity, radio transmission, air and space travel, nuclear power, the microchip, DNA: the human race has ever been on the cusp of innovation. Currently, biotechnology is the new frontier. Continuation of research is critical to New Zealand's future. As in the past, we should go forward but with care."

The Commission's Report can be found on www.gmcommission.govt.nz

What the report recommends:

- The establishment of a Bioethics Council to consider cultural, spiritual and ethical issues.
- The establishment of a parliamentary commissioner on biotechnology, modeled on the parliamentary commissioner for the environment.
- The development of a biotechnology strategy.
- A new category of "conditional release" of genetically modified organisms (GMO). Previously the only options were a total ban, contained trials, or released without control.
- That the first application for the release of a genetically modified crop be decided by the Environment Minister.
- That the Government facilitate voluntary labeling of non-genetically modified foods.
- Improved communication, transparency and accountability for the public.

The New Zealand Government has stated it will need three months to consider the report. But it must decide by August 31 on whether to end the current voluntary moratorium considering on new GMO field trials.